

September 2007

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Management Actions
Are Needed to
Effectively Integrate
Marine Corps Forces
into the U.S. Special
Operations Command

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Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) has relied on special operations forces to conduct military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq and to perform other tasks such as training foreign military forces. To meet the demand for these forces, DOD established a Marine Corps service component under the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to integrate Marine Corps forces. Under the authority of the Comptroller General, GAO assessed the extent to which (1) the Marine Corps special operations command has identified its force structure requirements, (2) the Marine Corps has developed a strategic human capital approach to manage personnel in its special operations command, and (3) USSOCOM has determined whether Marine Corps training programs are preparing its forces for assigned missions. GAO performed its work with the Marine Corps and USSOCOM and analyzed DOD plans for this new command.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Marine Corps conduct an analysis of the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command and that USSOCOM establish a basis to ensure they are trained to be fully interoperable with DOD's special operations forces. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD generally concurred with GAO's recommendations and noted that actions consistent with the recommendations are underway.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1030.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sharon Pickup at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov.

SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

Management Actions Are Needed to Effectively Integrate Marine Corps Forces into the U.S. Special Operations Command

What GAO Found

While the Marine Corps has made progress in establishing its special operations command (Command), the Command has not yet fully identified the force structure needed to perform its assigned missions. DOD developed initial force structure plans to establish the Command; however, it did not use critical practices of strategic planning, such as the alignment of activities and resources and the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes when developing these plans. As a result of limitations in the strategic planning process, the Command has identified several force structure challenges that will likely affect the Command's ability to perform its full range of responsibilities, and is working to revise its force structure.

Although preliminary steps have been taken, the Marine Corps has not developed a strategic human capital approach to manage the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command. While the Command has identified some skills needed to perform special operations missions, it has not conducted a comprehensive analysis to determine all of the critical skills and incremental training required of personnel in its special operations forces units. These analyses are critical to the Marine Corps' efforts to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of personnel in its special operations forces units. Without the benefit of these analyses, the Marine Corps has developed an interim policy to assign some personnel to special operations forces units for extended tour lengths to account for the additional training and skills; however, the policy is inconsistent with the Command's goal for the permanent assignment of some personnel within the special operations community. Until the Command completes an analysis to identify and document the critical skills and competencies needed by its future workforce to perform its full range of special operations missions, the Marine Corps will not have a sound basis for developing or evaluating alternative strategic human capital approaches for managing personnel assigned to its special operations forces units.

USSOCOM does not have a sound basis for determining whether the Command's training programs are preparing units for their missions because it has not established common training standards for many special operations skills and it has not formally evaluated whether these programs prepare units to be fully interoperable with other special operations forces. The Command is providing training to its forces that is based on training programs for conventional units that were assigned some special operations missions prior to the Command's activation and incorporates the training that USSOCOM's other service components provide to their forces. However, USSOCOM has not validated that the training for Marine Corps forces prepares them to be fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces. Without an evaluation, USSOCOM cannot demonstrate the needed assurances that Marine Corps forces are fully interoperable with its other forces, which may jeopardize the success of future joint missions.

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Abbreviations

DOD	Department of Defense
GAO	Government Accountability Office
SEAL	Sea, Air, Land
USSOCOM	U.S. Special Operations Command

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

September 5, 2007

The Honorable Carl Levin
Chairman
The Honorable John McCain
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Ike Skelton
Chairman
The Honorable Duncan Hunter
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

In 1987, the Department of Defense (DOD) established the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) with a primary mission to provide trained and combat-ready special operations forces to the department's geographic combatant commanders.¹ These forces differ from conventional forces in that they are specially organized, trained, and equipped to conduct operations in hostile or politically sensitive environments and they employ military capabilities that are not present in conventional military forces. Subsequent to its activation, USSOCOM assumed operational control of existing units from the Army, Navy, and Air Force.² However, the Marine Corps did not assign any of its forces to USSOCOM, citing a need to retain the flexibility needed to perform its missions. Instead, the Marine Corps created a program to deploy forces to the geographic combatant commands that were trained to perform some special operations missions.

¹The department's five geographic commands—U.S. Central Command, U.S. European Command, U.S. Northern Command, U.S. Pacific Command, and U.S. Southern Command—are responsible for U.S. military operations within their areas. DOD plans to establish a U.S. Africa Command with a full operational capability by the end of fiscal year 2008.

²Examples of existing special operations forces that were placed under USSOCOM's control include Army Special Forces and Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) units.

With the onset of the war on terrorism, DOD has greatly expanded the role of USSOCOM. As part of its strategy for this war, the department has relied on special operations forces to conduct military operations in the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. In addition, special operations forces have performed other types of military tasks, such as training and advising foreign military forces in a number of countries around the world, in order to build the capabilities of partner nations to combat terrorists more effectively within their own borders. To meet these commitments, special operations forces have experienced a substantial increase in deployments. For example, we reported in July 2006 that from fiscal year 2000 through fiscal year 2005, the average weekly number of special operations forces personnel who deployed to the department's geographic combatant commands increased by 64 percent.³ DOD recognizes that it needs additional special operations forces to defeat terrorist networks and has sought to increase the number of these forces. One department initiative to increase the number of special operations forces has been to integrate Marine Corps forces into USSOCOM. In 2005, the Secretary of Defense requested that the Marine Corps and USSOCOM develop plans to establish a Marine Corps service component to integrate Marine Corps forces within the special operations community. In October 2005, the Secretary of Defense approved the establishment of a Marine Corps special operations command (Command) as a service component to USSOCOM.

The Marine Corps activated its special operations command in February 2006, and in August 2006 began deploying special operations forces units to conduct missions for the geographic combatant commanders. On the basis of initial department guidance, the Marine Corps special operations command will be comprised of approximately 2,600 Marines and Navy personnel to train foreign military forces and conduct other special operations missions. According to current plans, the Command will be fully operationally capable by the end of fiscal year 2008.⁴ At DOD's request, the Congress has provided the Marine Corps and USSOCOM with regular and supplemental appropriations in fiscal years 2006 and 2007 totaling \$509.5 million (excluding military personnel costs) to establish the

³GAO, *Special Operations Forces: Several Human Capital Challenges Must Be Addressed to Meet Expanded Role*, [GAO-06-812](#) (Washington D.C.: July 31, 2006).

⁴The Marine Corps special operations command defines fully operationally capable as the organization, training, and equipping of 6 special operations companies and 16 foreign military training teams.

Marine Corps special operations command.⁵ In addition, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM have projected funding needs for the Command totaling \$907.8 million for fiscal years 2008 through 2013.

While USSOCOM is responsible for monitoring the status of its personnel, it does not have authority over personnel management issues such as recruiting, retention, or the assignment of servicemembers in special operations forces units. Instead, personnel management is the responsibility of each military service, and each service handles those responsibilities differently. For example, the Marine Corps is assigning personnel to its special operations command from a variety of career fields,⁶ such as reconnaissance and intelligence, and plans to rotate these personnel between special operations forces units and conventional force units. This policy is in contrast to the management of some special operations forces personnel in the other military services. The Army, for example, has established separate career fields for Special Forces and Civil Affairs soldiers and in fiscal year 2007, the Navy established a separate career field for SEALs. Once assigned to the Command, personnel will be provided with additional training for the skills that are required to perform special operations missions. In general, the Marine Corps will retain the responsibility for providing training for basic Marine Corps skills to personnel who are assigned to its special operations forces units. USSOCOM, through its Marine Corps service component command, is responsible for providing training for special operations-unique skills to Marine Corps personnel in these units.

We prepared this report under the Comptroller General's authority to conduct evaluations on his own initiative. Our objective was to evaluate DOD's efforts to establish a Marine Corps special operations command. Specifically, we assessed the extent to which (1) the Marine Corps special operations command has identified the force structure needed to perform its mission, (2) the Marine Corps has developed a strategic human capital approach to manage the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command, and (3) USSOCOM has determined whether Marine Corps special operations forces training programs are preparing these forces for assigned missions.

⁵Military personnel costs for all servicemembers, including special operations forces personnel, are included in the services' budgets.

⁶The military services delineate their force structure through career fields, or occupational specialties, which represent the jobs that are necessary to meet their specific missions.

To assess the extent to which the Marine Corps special operations command has identified the force structure needed to perform its mission, we identified and reviewed reports related to the department's efforts to increase the size of special operations forces by integrating Marine Corps forces into USSOCOM. We analyzed available internal DOD documentation such as briefings, guidance, and memoranda that identified DOD's plans and time frames for establishing the Marine Corps special operations command. We discussed DOD's decision-making processes for developing force structure plans for the new Command with officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense; the Joint Staff; Headquarters, Marine Corps; USSOCOM; and the geographic combatant commands. We also reviewed documents and interviewed officials with the Marine Corps special operations command to determine the force structure challenges the Command has identified and the plans that are being developed to revise its force structure. To assess the extent to which the Marine Corps has developed a strategic human capital approach to manage the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations forces units, we analyzed relevant Marine Corps policies for assigning personnel to conventional force units and to special operations forces units. We conducted interviews with officials from Headquarters, Marine Corps, who are responsible for managing personnel assigned to the Marine Corps special operations command. To better understand the unique personnel needs of the Marine Corps special operations command, we interviewed officials from the Command to discuss the specialized skills and training that are required by personnel who are assigned to special operations forces units to perform the Command's assigned missions. To assess the extent to which USSOCOM has determined whether Marine Corps special operations forces training programs are preparing these forces for assigned missions, we examined relevant laws and DOD doctrine related to the responsibilities of the Marine Corps and USSOCOM for training special operations forces personnel. We reviewed available documents that detail training programs for Marine Corps special operations forces. We collected and analyzed documents related to USSOCOM's evaluations of Marine Corps special operations forces training, and we discussed the efforts that have been taken by the Marine Corps special operations command and USSOCOM to assess the effectiveness of these training programs. Our assessment of data reliability concluded that the data used to support this review were sufficiently reliable to answer our objectives. We conducted our review from August 2006 through July 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology is contained in appendix I.

Results in Brief

Although the Marine Corps has made progress in establishing its special operations command, the Command has not yet fully identified the force structure needed to perform its assigned missions. The Marine Corps has taken several steps to establish its special operations command, such as activating the Command's headquarters, establishing Marine Corps special operations forces units, and deploying these units to conduct special operations missions. DOD developed initial force structure requirements for the Command by basing the composition and number of special operations units on existing units within the Marine Corps that had performed similar missions in the past, but did not use critical practices of effective strategic planning when developing these requirements. We have previously reported on several practices that are critical to effective strategic planning, including the alignment of activities and resources to support organizational missions and the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes to help ensure efforts and resources are targeted to the highest priorities.⁷ However, DOD did not fully incorporate these critical practices during its planning for the Marine Corps special operations command. For example, the Command's activities and resources were not fully aligned with the organization's mission. Neither the Office of the Secretary of Defense nor the Marine Corps conducted a comprehensive, data-driven analysis to determine the number of personnel needed to meet the Command's mission requirements, and the number of personnel authorized for the Command was not directly tied to specific mission requirements. In addition, we found that some key stakeholders were not involved in the establishment of the Marine Corps special operations command. For example, the special operations components within the department's geographic combatant commands—which are responsible for commanding special operations forces around the world—were not involved in the process to establish the Marine Corps special operations command or in the decisions to target the service's resources to their highest priorities and mission requirements. As a result of limitations in the strategic planning process, the Command has identified several challenges related to its planned force structure. For example, officials identified shortfalls in the number of personnel available to conduct support functions for Marine Corps special operations forces units. Additionally, the Command has determined that the number and composition of its special operations forces units are not aligned with the Command's mission requirements and, at the time we issued our report,

⁷GAO, *Executive Guide: Effectively Implementing the Government Performance and Results Act*, [GAO/GGD-96-118](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 1996).

the Marine Corps special operations command was developing several proposals to significantly revise its force structure to better meet its mission needs. These revisions would adjust the number and size of the Command's warfighter units to better meet mission requirements. Although the Command had not completed several analyses of the personnel and funding requirements that are tied to these proposed force structure changes, it has set milestones for completing its work. Until the analyses are completed, however, the Command will be unable to determine whether the approved plans for its personnel and funding should be adjusted in order for the Command to perform all of its assigned missions.

Although some preliminary steps have been taken, the Marine Corps has not developed a strategic human capital approach to manage personnel in its special operations command because the Command has not yet conducted a comprehensive analysis to identify the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations forces units. Our prior work has shown that the analysis of critical skill and competency gaps between current and future workforce needs is an important step in strategic human capital planning.⁸ The Marine Corps special operations command has begun to identify some of the critical skills that are needed to perform special operations missions. For example, as part of the effort to identify these critical skills, it is developing a training course that will provide baseline training to newly assigned personnel to prepare them for positions in warfighter units. The Command plans to provide these personnel with training on advanced survival skills and foreign languages. However, the Command has not conducted a comprehensive analysis to fully identify and document the advanced skills and additional training that are necessary to support its full range of assigned missions. Moreover, the Command has not yet fully determined which positions should be filled by specially trained personnel who are strategically managed to meet the Command's missions. Such analyses are critical to the Marine Corps' efforts to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of personnel in its special operations forces units. Without the benefit of these analyses, the Marine Corps has developed an interim policy to assign some personnel to special operations forces units for extended tour lengths to account for the additional training and skills. According to officials with Headquarters,

⁸GAO, *DOD Civilian Personnel: Comprehensive Strategic Workforce Plans Needed*, [GAO-04-753](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 30, 2004).

Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps special operations command, the interim policy is designed, in part, to retain some personnel at the Marine Corps special operations command long enough to complete specialized training and conduct at least two deployments. However, the interim policy is inconsistent with the Marine Corps special operations command's goal for the permanent assignment of some personnel within the special operations community. According to officials from the Command, permanent assignments for personnel in special operations forces units are necessary to develop and sustain the critical skills required to support the Command's full range of assigned missions. Officials with Headquarters, Marine Corps, told us the service plans to review the interim policy and work with the Marine Corps special operations command to develop a management strategy that better meets the Command's personnel needs. However, until the Command completes a comprehensive analysis to identify and document the critical skills and training needed by its future workforce to perform the Command's full range of assigned special operations missions, the Marine Corps will not have a sound basis for developing or evaluating alternative strategic human capital approaches for the management of personnel assigned to its special operations forces units.

USSOCOM does not have a sound basis for determining whether the Marine Corps special operations command's training programs are preparing its forces for their missions because it has not established common training standards for many special operations skills and it has not formally evaluated whether these programs will prepare units to be fully interoperable with other special operations forces. The Marine Corps special operations command has taken several actions to implement training programs to fulfill its responsibility for training personnel to a unique set of special operations forces standards. For example, the Command has provided training to its forces that has been adapted from the training programs for conventional units that were assigned some special operations missions prior to the activation of the Command. In addition, Command officials told us that training programs for missions that conventional units are not assigned have been determined by consulting with, and selectively incorporating, the service-specific training that USSOCOM's other service components provide to their special operations forces. Although USSOCOM is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of all training programs and for ensuring the interoperability of all of DOD's special operations forces, it does not have a sound basis to determine whether Marine Corps training programs are preparing units for their missions for two reasons. First, common training standards have not yet been established for many special operations skills. USSOCOM has

established common training standards for some skills, and is working on an incremental basis to develop common standards for additional skills because of the recognition that current service-specific training may not optimize opportunities for commonality, jointness, or efficiency. Second, while USSOCOM has taken some limited steps to evaluate the training provided to Marine Corps special operations forces, it has not formally validated that the training programs developed by the Marine Corps special operations command meet special operations forces standards and prepare forces to be fully interoperable with the department's other special operations forces. Without common training standards for special operations skills or a formal evaluation of the training and standards used to prepare Marine Corps forces for deployments, USSOCOM cannot demonstrate the needed assurances to the geographic combatant commanders that these forces are being trained to special operations forces standards and that these forces are fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces, thereby potentially impacting the success of future joint operations.

To facilitate the development of a strategic human capital approach for the management of personnel assigned to the Marine Corps special operations command and to validate that Marine Corps special operations forces are trained in a manner that is fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces, we are making recommendations to the Secretary of Defense to (1) direct the Commandant of the Marine Corps to conduct an analysis of the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in Marine Corps special operations forces units, establish milestones for conducting this analysis, and use the results of this analysis to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of these personnel; and (2) direct the Commander, USSOCOM, to establish a framework for evaluating Marine Corps special operations forces training programs to ensure the programs are sufficient to prepare Marine Corps special operations forces to be fully interoperable with the department's other special operations forces. In commenting on a draft of this report, DOD generally concurred with our recommendations and noted that actions consistent with the recommendations are underway.

Background

In 1986, the President signed a joint resolution of Congress that directed the Secretary of Defense to establish a unified combatant command for special operations forces.⁹ In April 1987, the Secretary of Defense

⁹Pub. L. No. 99-500, § 9115 (1986) (codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 167).

established USSOCOM with the mission to provide trained and combat-ready special operations forces to DOD’s geographic combatant commands. Since 2003, DOD has further expanded the role of USSOCOM to include greater responsibility for planning and leading the department’s efforts in the war on terrorism. In addition to training, organizing, equipping, and deploying combat-ready special operations forces to the geographic combatant commands, USSOCOM has the mission to lead, plan, synchronize, and, as directed, execute global operations against terrorist networks.

Tasks and Missions of
Special Operations Forces

DOD doctrine describes the characteristics of special operations forces, and provides joint force commanders with the guidance and information necessary to identify, nominate, and select missions appropriate for special operations forces.¹⁰ According to doctrine, special operations forces perform two types of activities: special operations forces perform tasks that no other forces in DOD conduct, and they perform tasks that other DOD forces conduct but do so according to a unique set of conditions and standards. In particular, special operations forces are specifically organized, trained, and equipped to accomplish nine core tasks, which represent the collective capabilities of all special operations forces rather than those of any one unit. Table 1 defines these core tasks.

Table 1: Description of Special Operations Forces’ Core Tasks	
Core task	Description
Direct action	Short duration strikes and other small-scale offensive actions conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to seize, destroy, capture, exploit, recover, or damage designated targets.
Special reconnaissance	Reconnaissance and surveillance actions conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to collect or verify information of strategic or operational significance, employing military capabilities not normally found in conventional forces.
Foreign internal defense	Participation by civilian and military agencies of a government in any of the action programs taken by another government or other designated organization, to free and protect its society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency.

¹⁰Department of Defense, Joint Pub. 3-05, *Doctrine for Joint Special Operations* (Dec. 17, 2003).

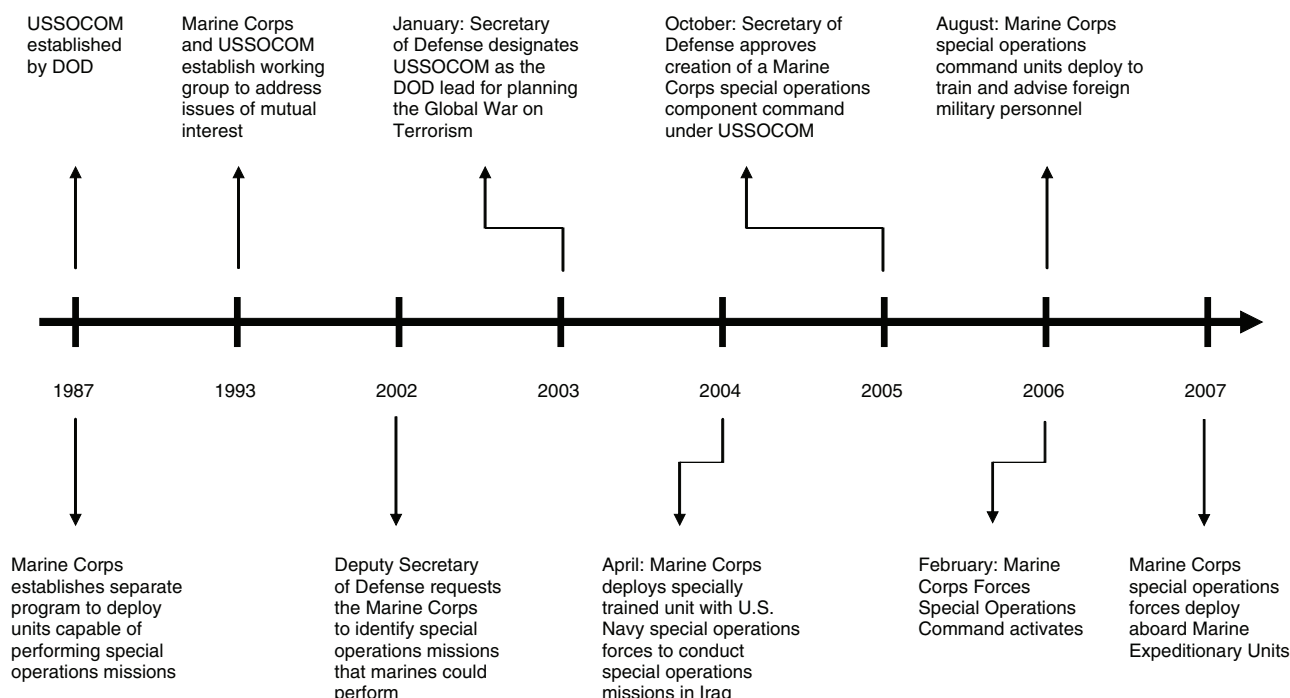
Core task	Description
Unconventional warfare	A broad spectrum of military and paramilitary operations, normally of long duration, predominately conducted through, with, or by indigenous or surrogate forces that are organized, trained, equipped, supported, and directed in varying degrees by an external source.
Counterterrorism	Offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism.
Counterproliferation of weapons of mass destruction	Actions taken to locate, seize, destroy, render safe, capture, or recover weapons of mass destruction.
Civil affairs operations	Operations that establish, maintain, influence, or exploit relations among military forces, government and nongovernmental civilian organizations and authorities, and the civilian populace in friendly, neutral, or hostile areas of operations in order to facilitate military operations and consolidate and achieve U.S. national objectives.
Psychological operations	Planned operations to convey selected information and indicators to foreign audiences to influence their emotions, motives, objective reasoning, and ultimately the behavior of foreign governments, organizations, groups, and individuals.
Information operations	Actions taken to affect adversary information and information systems while defending one's own information and information systems.

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Prior Actions Taken to Integrate Marine Corps Forces into USSOCOM

Since 1987, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM have taken several steps to expand the relationship between the two organizations. For example, beginning in 1993, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM established a working group to discuss efforts to improve communication, cooperation, and interoperability. These efforts received a renewed emphasis with the onset of the war on terrorism. In 2002, the Secretary of Defense requested the military services to increase their support to USSOCOM. In 2003, the Marine Corps established a specially trained and equipped unit as a concept to demonstrate the Marine Corps' ability to conduct special operations missions under the operational control of USSOCOM. This unit deployed to Iraq in April 2004 to perform selected special operations missions. The Secretary of Defense approved the establishment of a Marine Corps service component to USSOCOM in October 2005. In February 2006, the Marine Corps activated its special operations command. Since August 2006, the Marine Corps special operations command has deployed its forces to perform special operations missions to support the geographic combatant commanders' requirements. Figure 1 provides a timeline.

Figure 1: Timeline of Key Events in the Integration of Marine Corps Forces into USSOCOM



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Organization of Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

The Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command is the Marine Corps service component to USSOCOM. The Command is headquartered on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. The Marine Corps special operations command has five major subordinate units. These units include two Marine Special Operations Battalions, the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group,¹¹ the Marine Special Operations Support Group, and the Marine Special Operations School. Table 2 provides a description of each unit.

¹¹Prior to May 2007, the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group was named the Foreign Military Training Unit.

Table 2: Description of Units within the Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command

Unit	Description
Marine Special Operations Battalion	Provides special operations companies to perform direct action, special reconnaissance, and foreign internal defense operations; companies can deploy aboard a Marine Expeditionary Unit or independently.
Marine Special Operations Advisor Group	Provides tailored, combat skills training and advisor support for identified foreign forces to enhance the capability of partner nation forces.
Marine Special Operations Support Group	Provides tailorable and scalable support capabilities for worldwide special operations missions, including intelligence and communications support, combined arms, military working dog support, and combat service support.
Marine Special Operations School	Conducts assessment and selection of Marines assigned to Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, develops and standardizes doctrine and tactics, and trains and certifies units for worldwide deployments.

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

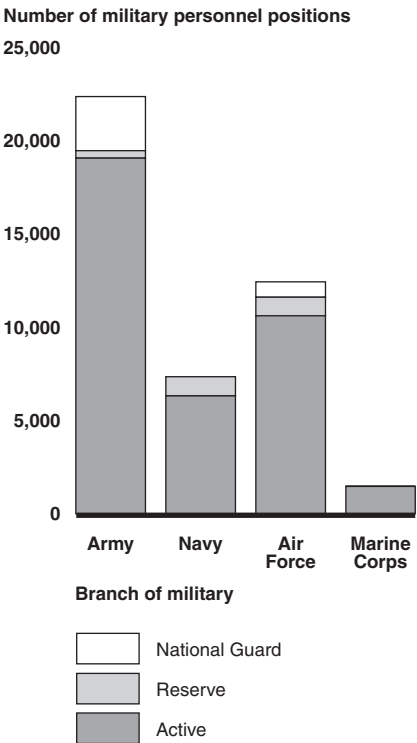
By fiscal year 2011, the Command will be authorized 2,516 personnel—2,483 military personnel and 33 civilians. With the exception of one Marine Corps reserve position, all of the authorized military personnel will be drawn from the military services' active components. The Marine Corps special operations component will be the smallest service component under USSOCOM. The other military services' special operations components include the following.

- The Army component is the U.S. Army Special Operations Command. Army special operations forces include Special Forces, Rangers, Special Operations Aviation, Civil Affairs, and Psychological Operations units.
- The Navy component is the Naval Special Warfare Command. Naval Special Warfare forces include SEAL Teams, SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams, and Special Boat Teams.
- The Air Force component is the Air Force Special Operations Command. Air Force special operations forces include fixed and rotary wing aviation squadrons, a combat aviation advisory squadron, special tactics squadrons, and an unmanned aerial vehicle squadron.

Figure 2 shows the number of military personnel positions in fiscal year 2007 authorized for DOD's special operations forces in the active component and reserve component. The authorizations include positions in special operations forces warfighter units, support units, and

headquarters units such as USSOCOM and its service component commands.

Figure 2: Fiscal Year 2007 Military Positions Authorized for Special Operations Forces Personnel in the Active Component and Reserve Component



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data.

Funding for the Marine Corps Special Operations Command

Since fiscal year 2006, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM have requested baseline and supplemental funding for the Marine Corps special operations command. In fiscal year 2006, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM received \$109.3 million in supplemental funds to establish the Marine Corps special operations command. In fiscal year 2007, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM received an additional \$368.2 million in baseline funds for the Command, and \$32 million in supplemental funding. As shown in table 3, the Marine Corps and USSOCOM have projected military construction, operation and maintenance, and procurement funding for the Command for fiscal years 2008 through 2013.

Table 3: Actual and Projected Funding for the Marine Corps Special Operations Command, Fiscal Years 2006 through 2013

Dollars in millions

Appropriation account	Fiscal year 2006	Fiscal year 2007	Fiscal year 2008	Fiscal year 2009	Fiscal year 2010	Fiscal year 2011	Fiscal year 2012	Fiscal year 2013
Military Construction	\$0	\$228.6	\$123.4	\$10.1	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
Operation and Maintenance	0	65.6	100.4	110.6	74.5	69.9	72.3	75.8
Procurement	0	74.0	56.1	57.6	70.6	77.4	2.2	6.9
Supplemental	109.3	32.0						
Total	\$109.3	\$400.2	\$279.9	\$178.3	\$145.1	\$147.3	\$74.5	\$82.7

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data as of February 13, 2007.

Note: Amounts include Marine Corps and USSOCOM funding for the Marine Corps special operations command.

Although Some Progress Made in Establishing Marine Corps Special Operations Command, Force Structure Needed to Perform Its Missions Has Not Been Fully Identified

Although the Marine Corps has made progress in establishing its special operations command, the Command has not fully identified the force structure needed to enable it to perform its assigned missions. The Marine Corps has taken several steps to establish its special operations command, such as activating the Command's headquarters, establishing Marine Corps special operations forces units, and deploying these units to conduct special operations missions; however, DOD did not use critical practices of effective strategic planning when developing the initial force structure plans for the Command. As a result of limitations in the strategic planning process, the Marine Corps special operations command has identified several force structure challenges that will likely affect the Command's ability to perform its full range of responsibilities, and is working to revise its force structure to address these challenges.

Steps Taken to Establish Marine Corps Special Operations Command, but Initial Force Structure Plans Were Not Developed Using Critical Practices of Effective Strategic Planning

The Marine Corps has taken several steps to establish the Marine Corps special operations command. For example, the Marine Corps has activated the headquarters of its special operations command, established some of its special operations forces units—including 4 special operations companies and 12 foreign military training teams to date—and deployed these units to conduct special operations missions. However, the initial force structure plans for the Command were not developed using critical practices of effective strategic planning. According to officials from the Office of the Secretary of Defense, USSOCOM, and the Marine Corps, the Secretary of Defense directed that the Marine Corps establish a special

operations command to meet the growing demand for special operations forces in the war on terrorism. The Secretary of Defense, with input from the Marine Corps, determined that 2,516 personnel was an appropriate size for the Command based on the assumptions that the Command was to be staffed within the existing Marine Corps end-strength, and the establishment of the Command could not significantly affect the Marine Corps budget. Marine Corps planners then based the composition and number of Marine Corps special operations forces units on existing units within the service that had trained to perform similar missions in the past. For example, Marine Corps officials told us that the force structure plans for its special operations companies were modeled after a Maritime Special Purpose Force, which had previously trained to conduct some special operations missions for conventional Marine Corps units.¹² Additionally, Marine Corps officials told us the initial force structure plan to establish nine special operations companies was based on the need to accommodate the deployment schedule of its Marine Expeditionary Units. The initial force structure plan also included the transfer of the Foreign Military Training Unit from the conventional force to its special operations command. Using this existing force structure, the Marine Corps planned to establish 24 foreign military training teams under its special operations command.

DOD did not fully incorporate critical practices of effective strategic planning when it developed these initial force structure plans for the Marine Corps special operations command. We have previously reported that strategic planning is important to ensure that an organization's activities support its strategic goals. Effective planning principles, such as those embodied in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993¹³ and used by leading organizations, require federal agencies to set strategic goals and develop strategic plans to accomplish those goals. Our prior work has identified several critical practices for effective strategic planning, including the alignment of activities and resources to meet organizational missions and stakeholder involvement. Our prior work has shown that leading organizations recognize that an organization's

¹²The Maritime Special Purpose Force was part of the Marine Corps' Marine Expeditionary Unit—Special Operations Capable Program. This program provided a forward deployed, sea-based Marine Air-Ground Task Force capable of executing designated maritime special operations, among other tasks. The Maritime Special Purpose Force was organized and trained using Marine Expeditionary Unit assets to provide a special operations-capable force that could be tailored to execute maritime special operations missions.

¹³Pub. L. No. 103-62 (1993).

activities, core processes, and resources must be aligned to support its mission and help it achieve its goals. Organizations should assess the extent to which their programs and activities contribute to meeting their mission and desired outcomes. In addition, successful organizations base their strategic planning, to a large extent, on the interests and expectations of their stakeholders. Stakeholder involvement is important to help agencies ensure that their efforts and resources are targeted at the highest priorities. Just as important, involving stakeholders in strategic planning efforts can help create a basic understanding among the stakeholders of the competing demands that confront most agencies, the limited resources available to them, and how those demands and resources require careful and continuous balancing.¹⁴

However, in our review of the planning process that preceded the establishment of the Marine Corps special operations command, we found the Command's activities and resources were not fully aligned with the organization's mission. For example, although the alignment of activities and resources to meet organizational missions, a critical practice of effective strategic planning, should include an analysis of the number of personnel required for an organization to accomplish its missions, Marine Corps officials stated that the size of the Marine Corps special operations command (2,516 personnel) was not determined through an analysis of the Command's assigned missions. Specifically, neither the Office of the Secretary of Defense nor the Marine Corps conducted a comprehensive, data-driven analysis to determine the number of personnel needed to meet the Marine Corps special operations command's mission requirements that directly tied the number of personnel authorized for the Command with its assigned missions. USSOCOM did not provide official mission guidance to the Marine Corps until October 2006, almost 1 year after the Command's personnel authorizations had been determined. In the absence of specific guidance, Marine Corps planners did not conduct a comprehensive, data-driven analysis to determine the number of personnel needed to meet the Marine Corps special operations command's full range of mission requirements. Our prior work has shown that valid and reliable data on the number of employees required to meet an agency's needs are critical

¹⁴ [GAO/GGD-96-118](#).

because human capital shortfalls can threaten an agency's ability to perform its missions efficiently and effectively.¹⁵

The alignment of activities and resources should also include an analysis of the number and composition of Marine Corps special operations forces units. However, the Marine Corps did not determine the number and composition of its special operations forces units based on specific guidance from USSOCOM. Although the Marine Corps special operations command was established as the Marine Corps service component under USSOCOM, USSOCOM did not provide guidance to Marine Corps planners on the full range of missions assigned to the Command, or on the number of special operations forces that the Marine Corps needed to provide. Both USSOCOM and Marine Corps officials reported that USSOCOM provided only informal guidance to Marine Corps planners on the core tasks that would be assigned to Marine Corps special operations forces units. According to Marine Corps officials involved in the planning for the Marine Corps special operations command, the informal guidance did not prioritize the core tasks to focus Marine Corps planning efforts, and the guidance did not identify the required capacity for specific capabilities within the Command.

The official guidance that USSOCOM provided to the Marine Corps special operations command in October 2006 contained a complete list of missions the Command would be expected to perform. However, the guidance did not prioritize these missions to focus the Command's planning efforts. Additionally, the guidance did not establish milestones and benchmarks that the Command could use to determine when, and to what level of proficiency, Marine Corps special operations forces units should be able to perform all of their assigned missions. In the absence of specific guidance, Marine Corps officials told us the initial force structure plan to establish nine special operations companies was not based on a USSOCOM requirement for the number of these companies. Moreover, while the decision to transfer the foreign military training teams to the Marine Corps special operations command met the Command's mission to provide USSOCOM with a foreign internal defense capability, the decision on the number of teams needed by the Command to meet USSOCOM's mission requirements was left to the Marine Corps. Marine Corps officials also told us that in the absence of clear guidance on the required capacity

¹⁵GAO, *A Model of Strategic Human Capital Management*, [GAO-02-373SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 15, 2002).

for support personnel within the Command, Marine Corps planners prioritized the assignment of personnel in warfighter positions in special operations forces units over positions in support units. Specifically, because planners were basing the Command's force structure decisions on the personnel limit established by DOD, the Marine Corps exchanged positions related to support functions within the Command for positions in its warfighter units. Support functions such as vehicle maintenance, motor transportation, intelligence operations, communication support, and engineering support provide important and necessary support to Marine Corps special operations forces units, as well as other special operations forces units in USSOCOM's other service components.

Furthermore, we found a lack of involvement by some key stakeholders in the establishment of the Marine Corps special operations command. For example, the special operations components with the department's geographic combatant commands—which are responsible for commanding special operations forces around the world—were not involved in the process to establish the Marine Corps special operations command or in the decisions to target the service's resources to their highest priorities and mission requirements. Officials with the U.S. Pacific Command's special operations command who are responsible for functions such as operations and planning told us they provided little input into the planning process to help determine how Marine Corps special operations forces units should be organized and what capabilities were needed in these units to meet the mission requirements of the geographic combatant commands. Similarly, officials from the U.S. Central Command's special operations command who were responsible for operations and planning in that command told us they were not included in the planning process that preceded the establishment of the Marine Corps special operations command. In particular, officials told us they were not involved in the decisions regarding the types of missions that Marine Corps special operations forces units would need to perform, although as we noted in our July 2006 report on special operations forces deployment trends, 85 percent of all fiscal year 2005 special operations forces deployments were to the U.S. Central Command's area of responsibility.¹⁶

¹⁶ [GAO-06-812](#).

Limitations in Strategic Planning Process Led to Force Structure Challenges, although Plans Are Being Revised to Address These Challenges

The Marine Corps special operations command has identified several force structure challenges that stem from limitations in DOD's strategic planning process that will likely affect its ability to perform its full range of responsibilities, and the Command is revising its force structure plans to address these challenges. For example, the Command has determined that the number and composition of its special operations forces units are not aligned with the Command's mission requirements. In particular, the Command has identified shortages in positions such as authorized intelligence personnel, which will affect the Command's ability to simultaneously provide intelligence support to Marine Corps special operations forces and USSOCOM. Moreover, according to Marine Corps special operations command officials, the limited number of personnel available to perform support functions will prevent the Command from effectively performing all of its mission requirements. To illustrate this point, Marine Corps special operations command officials told us that the initial force structure plans for the Command call for less than one support person available for every person assigned to a warfighter position. According to Command officials, this ratio is less than what would be expected for a command of similar size and assigned missions. Officials said an expected ratio for a command such as theirs would be at least two support personnel to one warfighter, and therefore their goal is to adjust the force structure to meet this ratio.

In addition, Marine Corps special operations command officials reported that the number of positions authorized for support personnel will also affect the Command's ability to meet its responsibilities to organize, train, and equip Marine Corps special operations forces. Officials stated the number of personnel assigned to its command elements, such as the headquarters and the staffs of the subordinate units, is insufficient to effectively accomplish these responsibilities. Current force structure plans authorize approximately 780 military personnel and 33 civilian personnel for the Command's headquarters and the staffs of its major subordinate units.

At the time of our work, the Marine Corps special operations command was developing several proposals to significantly revise its force structure to address the challenges stemming from the limitations in the planning process and to better align the Command to meet USSOCOM's mission guidance. These revisions would adjust the number and size of the Command's warfighter units to better meet mission requirements. Additionally, if approved, some of the positions made available through the revisions could be used to remedy shortfalls in personnel who perform support functions such as personnel management, training, logistics,

intelligence, and budget-related activities. Command officials told us these proposals would likely mitigate many of the challenges that have resulted from the lack of a comprehensive strategic planning process, but they acknowledged that many of the decisions that are needed to implement the force structure changes will be made by Headquarters, Marine Corps. In order to move forward with its proposals, the Command is working to complete several analyses of the personnel and funding requirements that are tied to these proposed force structure changes. It has set milestones for when these analyses should be completed in order to determine whether any additional funding or personnel would be required. However, the Command expects to be able to implement these proposals within the funding levels already identified and planned for future fiscal years. Until the analyses are completed, the Command will be unable to determine whether the approved plans for its personnel and funding should be adjusted in order for the Command to perform all of its assigned missions.

Although Preliminary Steps Have Been Taken, the Marine Corps Has Not Developed a Strategic Human Capital Approach to Manage the Critical Skills And Competencies Required of Personnel in Its Special Operations Command

Although preliminary steps have been taken, the Marine Corps has not developed a strategic human capital approach to manage the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command. While the Marine Corps special operations command has identified some skills that are needed to perform special operations missions, it has not conducted a comprehensive analysis of the critical skills and incremental training required of personnel in its special operations forces units. Such analyses are critical to the Marine Corps' efforts to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of personnel in its special operations forces units. Without the benefit of these analyses, the Marine Corps has developed an interim policy to assign some personnel to special operations forces units for extended tour lengths to account for the additional training and skills needed by these personnel. However, this interim policy is inconsistent with the Marine Corps special operations command's goal for the permanent assignment of some personnel within the special operations community.

While Some Personnel Requirements Have Been Identified, Marine Corps Special Operations Command Has Not Fully Identified the Critical Skills and Competencies Required of Its Personnel

While the Marine Corps special operations command has identified some critical skills and competencies that are needed to perform special operations missions, it has not fully identified these requirements because it has not yet conducted a comprehensive analysis to determine all the critical skills and additional training required of personnel in its units. We have previously reported that strategic human capital planning is essential to federal agencies' efforts to transform their organizations to meet the challenges of the 21st century. Generally, strategic human capital planning addresses two needs: (1) aligning an agency's human capital program with its current and emerging mission and programmatic goals, and (2) developing long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, motivating, and retaining staff to achieve programmatic goals. Our prior work has shown that the analysis of critical skill and competency gaps between current and future workforce needs is an important step in strategic human capital planning.¹⁷ We have also reported that it is essential that long-term strategies include implementation goals and timelines to demonstrate that progress is being made.

As part of the effort to identify these critical skills, the Marine Special Operations School is developing a training course that will provide baseline training to newly assigned personnel to prepare them for positions in warfighter units. For example, the Command plans to provide these personnel with training on advanced survival skills and foreign language in order to prepare them to perform special operations missions. However, the Marine Corps special operations command has not fully identified and documented the critical skills and training that are required for personnel to effectively perform special operations missions, and that build on the skills that are developed in conventional Marine Corps units. Officials told us the Command had not yet identified the full range of training that will be provided in this course in order to establish a minimum level of special operations skills for the Command's warfighters. Additionally, the Marine Corps special operations command has not fully identified the advanced skills and training necessary to support some of the Command's more complex special operations missions, such as counterterrorism, information operations, and unconventional warfare. While the Marine Corps special operations command has established a time frame for when it wants to conduct the training course under development, it has not set milestones for when it will complete its analysis of the critical skills and competencies required of its personnel.

¹⁷ [GAO-04-753](#).

Moreover, the Marine Corps special operations command has not yet fully determined which positions should be filled by specially trained personnel who are strategically managed to meet the Command's missions. Officials told us there is broad agreement within the Command that personnel assigned to operational positions in its warfighter units require specialized training in critical skills needed to perform special operations missions, and should therefore be strategically managed to meet the Command's mission requirements. These personnel include enlisted reconnaissance and communications Marines assigned to the Marine Special Operations Battalions and infantry Marines assigned to the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group, as well as some officers assigned to these units. At the time of our review, however, we found that the Command had not yet determined which additional positions should also be filled by personnel who are strategically managed. In particular, we were told by officials from the Command's headquarters that a determination has not yet been made as to whether personnel who deploy with warfighter units to provide critical combat support, such as intelligence personnel, require specialized skills and training that are incremental to the training provided in conventional force units. For example, officials have not yet decided whether intelligence personnel should attend the initial training course that is under development. However, the Marine Special Operations School plans to provide these personnel with specialized intelligence training to enable them to support certain sensitive special operations missions in support of deploying units. Officials acknowledge that until the Command determines the extent to which support personnel require specialized skills and training to perform their missions, the Command cannot fully identify which positions should be filled by personnel who are strategically managed.

Marine Corps Has Developed an Interim Policy to Manage Personnel in Its Special Operations Command, but It Lacks Consensus on a Strategic Human Capital Approach

To address the personnel needs of the Marine Corps special operations command, Headquarters, Marine Corps, has established an interim policy that provides for extended assignments of some personnel in special operations forces units; however, the absence of a comprehensive analysis of the critical skills and training required of personnel in special operations forces units has contributed to a lack of consensus within the Marine Corps on a strategic human capital approach to manage these personnel. The extended assignments apply to Marines who are beyond their first term of enlistment, which is typically 3 to 5 years, and who are assigned to one of the Marine Corps special operations command's warfighter, training, or intelligence units. The policy directs that these personnel will be assigned to the Command for 48 months, in part, to account for the additional training provided to personnel in these units.

According to officials at Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps special operations command, the 48-month assignment policy is designed to retain designated personnel within special operations forces units long enough to complete at least two deployments. All other Marines will be assigned to the Command for approximately 36 months, which is a typical tour length for Marines in conventional force units.

The interim policy also addresses a concern that personnel assigned to special operations forces units will have opportunities for career progression. In general, Marines are managed according to established career progression models for their respective career fields. These career progression models identify the experiences, skills, and professional military education necessary for personnel to be competitive for promotion to the next grade. For example, as personnel are promoted to a higher grade, they are typically placed in positions with increased responsibilities that are consistent with their career progression models in order to remain competitive for further promotion. The Marine Corps has not established a separate career field for special operations forces personnel; instead, the Marine Corps is assigning personnel from a variety of career fields, such as reconnaissance, to its special operations forces units. However, the current structure of the Marine Corps special operations command cannot support long-term assignments of personnel within the Command, in some cases, due to limited opportunities for progression into positions with increased responsibilities. For example, our analysis of the Marine Corps special operations command's force structure shows that the Command is authorized 76 percent fewer reconnaissance positions for personnel in the grade of E-7 as compared to the number of reconnaissance positions for personnel in the grade of E-6. The Marine Corps has established targets for the promotion of reconnaissance personnel to the grade of E-7 after they have spent approximately 5 years in the grade of E-6. As a result, many reconnaissance personnel who are promoted to E-7 while assigned to a special operations forces unit will need to be reassigned to the conventional force in order to move into an E-7 position and remain competitive for further promotion.

The interim policy is also consistent with the approved plan to increase the authorized end-strength of the Marine Corps. In January 2007, the President approved plans to increase the active duty end-strength of the Marine Corps from 179,000 in fiscal year 2006 to 202,000 by fiscal year 2011. This plan includes growth in the number and size of conventional force units and is intended to reduce the stress on frequently deployed units, such as intelligence units, by achieving a 1 to 2 deployment to home

station ratio for these units. Marine Corps officials associated with units that will be affected by these increases, such as reconnaissance and intelligence units, told us that the rotation of personnel from Marine Corps special operations units back into the conventional force is important to help ensure that conventional force units are staffed with experienced and mature personnel. For example, our analysis of Marine Corps data shows that by fiscal year 2009, the Marine Corps will increase the servicewide requirement for enlisted counterintelligence/human intelligence personnel by 50 percent above fiscal year 2006 levels. Although the Marine Corps is adjusting its accession, training, and retention strategies to meet the increased requirement for enlisted counterintelligence/human intelligence personnel, officials stated the rotation of these experienced personnel from the Marine Corps special operations command back into the conventional force can help meet the increased personnel needs of conventional intelligence units, while also ensuring that conventional force units have an understanding of special operations tactics, techniques, and procedures. Additionally, officials told us the rotation of personnel from special operations forces units to conventional force units supports the Marine Corps' process for prioritizing the assignment of personnel to units that are preparing for deployments to Iraq and other war on terrorism requirements.

Notwithstanding the intended outcome of the interim policy, Marine Corps special operations command officials told us that the policy might impact the Command's ability to prepare its forces to conduct the full range of its assigned missions and that the policy is inconsistent with the Command's stated goal for the permanent assignment of personnel in its special operations forces units. In congressional testimony, the Commander of the Marine Corps special operations command specified his goal to develop a personnel management strategy that would retain some personnel within the special operations community for the duration of their careers. Officials from the Command told us that a substantial investment of time and resources is required to train personnel in special operations forces units on the critical skills needed to perform special operations missions. For example, Marine Corps special operations forces personnel will receive in-depth training to develop foreign language proficiency and cultural awareness, which is consistent with DOD's requirement to increase the capacity of special operations forces to perform more demanding and specialized tasks during long-duration, indirect, and clandestine operations in politically sensitive environments.¹⁸ However,

¹⁸Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report* (February 2006).

these officials believe that the Command's ability to develop and sustain these skills over time will be hampered if its special operations forces units experience high personnel turnover. In addition, according to USSOCOM doctrine, personnel must be assigned to a special operations forces unit for at least 4 years in order to be fully trained in some advanced special operations skills. Consequently, officials from the Command have determined that limited duration assignments would challenge the Command's ability to develop the capability to conduct more complex special operations core tasks, and to retain fully trained personnel long enough to use their skills during deployments. The Marine Corps special operations command has determined that to achieve its goal of permanent personnel assignments within the special operations community, it requires a separate career field for its warfighter personnel. According to officials from the Command, a separate career field would allow the Marine Corps to manage these personnel based on a career progression model that reflects the experiences, skills, and professional military education that are relevant to special operations missions. Moreover, according to officials from the Command, the establishment of a special operations forces career field would allow the Marine Corps to develop and sustain a population of trained and qualified personnel, while providing the Command and USSOCOM with a more appropriate return on the investment in training personnel to perform special operations missions.

The Command's goal for the permanent assignment of some special operations forces personnel is also consistent with USSOCOM's current and projected needs for special operations forces personnel. USSOCOM has identified the retention of experienced personnel who possess specialized skills and training as a key component in its strategy to support the war on terrorism. In its vision of how special operations forces will meet long-term national strategic and military objectives,¹⁹ USSOCOM has identified the need for a comprehensive special operations forces career management system to facilitate the progression of these personnel through increasing levels of responsibility within the special operations community. In addition, senior USSOCOM officials have expressed support for an assignment policy that allows Marine Corps personnel to remain within the special operations community for the duration of their careers.

¹⁹U.S. Special Operations Command, *Capstone Concept for Special Operations* (2006).

Headquarters, Marine Corps, plans to review its interim policy for assigning personnel to its special operations command annually to determine whether it meets the mission requirements of the Command. Additionally, the Commandant of the Marine Corps recently directed Headquarters, Marine Corps, to study the assignment policies for personnel in certain Army special operations forces units who rotate between conventional Army units and special operations forces units. According to a Headquarters, Marine Corps, official, one purpose of this study is to evaluate whether a similar management strategy may be applied to personnel in Marine Corps special operations forces units. Notwithstanding these efforts, officials with Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps special operations command acknowledge that the analysis of the critical skills and training required of personnel in the Command's special operations forces units is a necessary step in the development of a strategic human capital approach to the management of these personnel. Until the Marine Corps special operations command completes a comprehensive analysis to identify and document the critical skills and additional training needed by its future workforce to perform the Command's full range of assigned special operations missions, the Marine Corps will not have a sound basis for developing or evaluating alternative strategic human capital approaches for the management of personnel assigned to its special operations forces units.

USSOCOM Does Not Have a Sound Basis for Determining Whether Marine Corps Special Operations Forces Training Programs Prepare Units for Missions

USSOCOM does not have a sound basis for determining whether Marine Corps special operations forces training programs are preparing units for their missions because it has not established common training standards for many special operations skills and it has not formally evaluated whether these programs will prepare units to be fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces. The Marine Corps special operations command has provided training for its forces that is based on training that was provided to conventional units that were assigned some special operations missions prior to the activation of the Command, and by selectively incorporating the training that USSOCOM's other service components provide to their forces. However, USSOCOM has not formally validated that the training used to prepare Marine Corps special operations forces meets special operations standards and is effective in training Marine Corps special operations forces to be fully interoperable with the department's other special operations forces.

Marine Corps Special Operations Command Has Implemented Programs to Train Personnel to Perform Special Operations Missions

The Marine Corps special operations command has taken several actions to implement programs to fulfill its responsibility for training personnel to perform special operations missions. For example, the Command operates the Marine Special Operations School, which has recently finalized plans for a training pipeline to initially screen all of the Marines and Sailors identified for assignment to the Command to determine their suitability for such assignments. Once the initial screening is completed, personnel who volunteer for assignments in one of the Command's warfighter units—such as the Marine Special Operations Battalions and the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group—will undergo an additional assessment that measures mental and physical qualifications. As indicated by the Command's plans, personnel who successfully complete this assessment will be provided with additional baseline special operations training prior to being assigned to one of the Command's warfighter units.²⁰

The Marine Special Operations School also provides training to personnel in special operations companies. This training consists of both classroom instruction and the practical application of specialized skills. For example, the school has provided training to personnel in skills such as precision shooting, close quarters battle, and special reconnaissance techniques. In addition, the school's instructors conduct exercises to train the special operations companies on the unit's tactics, techniques, and procedures, as well as predeployment training events, to certify the companies are capable of performing the primary special operations missions assigned to these units.²¹

The Command's Marine Special Operations Advisor Group has also developed a comprehensive training program designed to build the individual and collective skills required to perform the unit's mission to provide military training and advisor support to foreign forces. The program includes individual training for skills such as light infantry tactics and cultural and language training, as well as training for advanced skills in functional areas such as communications, intelligence, and medical training. The training program culminates with a capstone training event

²⁰As discussed previously in this report, the Marine Corps special operations command has not fully determined what baseline training will be provided to special operations forces personnel or which personnel will be required to receive this training.

²¹In addition to the training exercise to certify these units are capable of performing special operations missions, the special operations companies also conduct an extensive training program with a Marine Expeditionary Unit prior to deployment.

that evaluates the proficiency of personnel in mission-essential skills. The training event is used as a means of certifying that these units are trained to perform their assigned missions.

In addition, Marine Corps special operations companies and Marine Special Operations Advisor Group teams conduct unit training to prepare for the missions that will be performed during deployments. According to officials with these units, this training is tailored to prepare personnel for the specific tasks that will likely be performed during the deployment. For example, officials stated that unit training may include enhanced language and cultural awareness training for specific countries and training in environmental terrains where these units will be deployed.

Marine Corps special operations forces have used conventional Marine Corps training standards to prepare personnel and units to conduct some special operations missions. Officials with the Marine Corps special operations command and its subordinate units told us that its special operations forces units have trained personnel in some skills based on the training programs for conventional units that were assigned some special operations missions prior to the activation of the Command. For example, according to Marine Corps policy, the service formerly deployed specially organized, trained, and equipped forces as part of the Marine Expeditionary Units that were capable of conducting some special operations missions, such as direct action operations.²² Officials with the Marine Corps special operations command and the Marine Corps Special Operations Battalions told us that the special operations companies have been provided with training for skills such as urban sniper, specialized demolitions, and dynamic assault that is based largely on the training and standards for these skills that were established for conventional Marine Corps forces.

For other skills, Marine Corps special operations forces personnel have reviewed and incorporated the training plans that USSOCOM's Army, Navy, and Air Force service components use to prepare their special operations forces. Marine Corps special operations command officials told us that conventional Marine Corps units are not typically trained in many of the advanced skills required to perform some special operations

²²The Maritime Special Purpose Force was organized and trained using Marine Expeditionary Unit assets to provide a special operations-capable force that could be tailored to execute a maritime special operations mission.

missions, such as counterterrorism and unconventional warfare. To develop programs to train personnel on the skills required to perform these and other special operations missions, Marine Corps special operations forces have incorporated the training and standards from the training publications of the U.S. Army Special Operations Command, the Naval Special Warfare Command, and the Air Force Special Operations Command. However, according to a senior USSOCOM official, Marine Corps special operations forces have had the discretion to select the standards to use when training forces to perform special operations skills.

During our review, we met with servicemembers who had recently completed deployments with Marine Corps special operations forces units as well as with servicemembers who were preparing for planned deployments. In general, these servicemembers told us that they believed they were adequately trained and prepared to perform their assigned missions. Team leaders with the Marine Special Operations Advisor Group, for example, stated that they received sufficient guidance to properly plan and execute special operations missions during deployments to train and advise foreign military forces. However, at the time of our work, the Marine Corps special operations companies that participated in the first deployments of these units had not yet completed their deployments. As a result, we were unable to discuss whether the training that was provided was adequate to fully meet their mission requirements.

USSOCOM Has Not Formally Validated That Marine Corps Training Meets Special Operations Forces Standards and Prepares Forces to Be Fully Interoperable with Other Forces

USSOCOM has not formally validated that the training used to prepare Marine Corps forces meets special operations standards and prepares forces to be fully interoperable with the department's other special operations forces. The Marine Corps special operations command has made progress in developing and implementing training programs for Marine Corps special operations forces. However, the Command has not used common training standards for special operations skills because USSOCOM has not developed common training standards for many skills, although work to establish common standards is ongoing. USSOCOM officials stated the headquarters and the service components are working to develop common training standards, where appropriate, because USSOCOM recognizes that the service-specific training conducted for advanced special operations skills may not optimize opportunities for commonality, jointness, or efficiency. In addition, USSOCOM officials told us that common training standards would further promote departmentwide interoperability goals, address potential safety concerns, and provide greater assurances to future joint force commanders that special operations forces are trained to similar standards.

Our prior work has shown that the lack of commonality in training standards for joint operations creates potentially hazardous conditions on the battlefield. For example, we reported in 2003 that the military services and the special operations community did not use common standards to train personnel to control air support of ground forces. In particular, we found that the standards for these personnel in special operations units differed among the Army, Navy, and Air Force because personnel were required to meet their service-specific training requirements, which led to hesitation by commanders in Afghanistan to employ some special operations forces personnel to direct air support of ground forces.²³ In 2005, USSOCOM established minimum standards for training, qualifying, evaluating, and certifying special operations forces personnel who control air support of ground forces.

USSOCOM formalized a process in 2006 to establish and validate common training standards for special operations skills. As part of this process, USSOCOM established a working group comprised of representatives from USSOCOM and each service component to determine the baseline tasks that define the training standard and the service component training requirements for special operations skills. According to a USSOCOM official, the working group first identified the common training requirements and standards for the skills of military free fall and combat dive. In addition, USSOCOM and its service components are working incrementally to identify common training standards for other special operations skills, such as the training required for personnel assigned to combined joint special operations task forces.²⁴ However, officials with USSOCOM and the Marine Corps special operations command told us the process to establish common training standards for applicable special operations skills will likely take a considerable amount of time to complete due to the number of advanced special operations skills and the challenge of building consensus among the service components on what constitutes a common training standard.

²³ GAO, *Military Readiness: Linger Training and Equipment Issues Hamper Air Support of Ground Forces*, [GAO-03-505](#) (May 2, 2003).

²⁴ Combined joint special operations task forces are composed of special operations units from one or more foreign countries and more than one U.S. military department. They are formed to carry out a specific special operation or to prosecute special operations in support of a theater campaign or other operations. The combined joint special operations task force may have conventional units assigned or attached to support the conduct of specific missions.

Furthermore, USSOCOM has not formally validated whether the training used to prepare Marine Corps forces meets special operations standards and prepares forces to be fully interoperable with the department's other special operations forces. USSOCOM has taken some limited steps to evaluate the training provided to Marine Corps special operations forces. In November 2006, for example, USSOCOM representatives attended a training exercise on Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton for a Marine special operations company that was preparing for an upcoming deployment. In addition, USSOCOM representatives observed training exercises in February 2007 for Marine Special Operations Advisor Group teams that were preparing to deploy. A USSOCOM official told us that the purpose of these evaluations was to observe some of the planned training tasks and focus on areas where USSOCOM could assist the Marine Corps special operations command in future training exercises. However, USSOCOM has not formally assessed the training programs used by the Marine Corps special operations command to prepare its forces for deployments, despite the fact that USSOCOM is responsible for evaluating the effectiveness of all training programs and ensuring the interoperability of all of DOD's special operations forces. Our review of the reports prepared for USSOCOM leadership and provided to Marine Corps personnel showed that they did not contain a formal evaluation of the training content and they did not provide an assessment of the standards used during the training to determine whether the training was in accordance with special operations forces standards.

Officials with the Marine Corps special operations command and its subordinate units told us that USSOCOM has not been extensively involved in the development of Marine Corps special operations forces training programs and the performance standards used to train Marine Corps special operations forces. In addition, USSOCOM officials told us that a formal assessment of Marine Corps training programs has not occurred, and will likely not occur, because the management of the Marine Corps special operations command's training programs is, like the other service components, a responsibility delegated to the Marine Corps component commander. These officials told us the service component commander has the primary responsibility for establishing training programs and certifying that special operations forces are capable of performing special operations missions prior to deployments. In addition, a USSOCOM official stated that any training-related issues affecting the readiness of special operations forces are identified in readiness reports and are discussed during monthly meetings between senior USSOCOM leadership and the service component commanders. However, without common training standards for special operations skills or a formal

validation of the training used to prepare Marine Corps special operations forces for planned deployments in the near term, USSOCOM cannot demonstrate the needed assurances to the geographic combatant commanders that Marine Corps special operations forces are trained to special operations forces standards and that these forces meet departmentwide interoperability goals for special operations forces, thereby potentially affecting the success of future joint operations.

Conclusions

Since activating a Marine Corps component to USSOCOM, the Marine Corps has made considerable progress integrating into the special operations force structure, and several Marine Corps units have successfully completed deployments to train foreign military forces—a key focus area in DOD’s strategy for the war on terrorism. The Marine Corps has also taken an initial step to meet the unique personnel needs of its special operations command. However, it does not have complete information on all of the critical skills and additional training required of its personnel in special operations forces units. This information would enable the Marine Corps to assess the effectiveness of its human capital planning to date and build consensus on the development of alternative approaches for the management of its personnel assigned to special operations forces units. Until the Marine Corps develops a strategic human capital approach that is based on an analysis of the critical skills and training required of personnel in Marine Corps special operations forces units, it may be unable to align its personnel with the Marine Corps special operations command’s actual workforce requirements, which could jeopardize the long-term success of this new Command.

The Marine Corps special operations command faces an additional challenge in training its forces to special operations forces standards and meeting DOD interoperability goals because USSOCOM has not yet established common training standards for many advanced skills. In the absence of common training standards, the Marine Corps special operations command is training its newly established special operations forces units in some skills that were not previously trained in conventional Marine Corps units. Unless USSOCOM validates that the training currently being used to prepare Marine Corps special operations forces is effective and meets DOD’s interoperability goals, it will be unable to ensure that Marine Corps special operations forces are interoperable with other special operations forces in the department, thereby potentially affecting the success of future joint operations.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To facilitate the development of a strategic human capital approach for the management of personnel assigned to the Marine Corps special operations command and to validate that Marine Corps special operations forces are trained to be fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces, we recommend that the Secretary of Defense take the following two actions.

- Direct the Commandant of the Marine Corps to direct the Commander, Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, to conduct an analysis of the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in Marine Corps special operations forces units and establish milestones for conducting this analysis. This analysis should be used to assess the effectiveness of current assignment policies and to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of these personnel.
- Direct the Commander, USSOCOM, to establish a framework for evaluating Marine Corps special operations forces training programs, including their content and standards, to ensure the programs are sufficient to prepare Marine Corps forces to be fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

In written comments on a draft of this report, DOD generally concurred with our recommendations and noted that actions consistent with the recommendations are underway. DOD's comments are reprinted in appendix II. DOD also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into the report as appropriate.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to require the Commandant of the Marine Corps to direct the Commander, Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, to establish milestones for conducting an analysis of the critical skills and competencies required in Marine Corps special operations forces units and, once completed, use this analysis to assess the effectiveness of current assignment policies and develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of these personnel. DOD stated that the Marine Corps special operations command is currently conducting a detailed analysis of the critical skills and competencies required to conduct the missions assigned to the Command. The department further noted that the Command will also fully develop mission-essential task lists, and individual and collective training standards in order to clearly state the requirements for training and personnel. DOD also stated that USSOCOM is providing assistance so that these processes are integrated with USSOCOM's development of the Joint

Training System, which is mandated by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. We believe these are important steps if fully implemented. We note, however, DOD's response does not address the issue of milestones and gives no indication when the ongoing analysis will be completed. We believe milestones are important because they serve as a means of holding people accountable. Furthermore, DOD did not address the need for the Marine Corps to use the analysis being conducted by the Command to assess the effectiveness of the current assignment policy. Without such an assessment, neither the Marine Corps nor DOD will have needed assurances that the current Marine Corps policy for assigning personnel to its special operations command is providing DOD with an appropriate return on the investment the department is making to train Marine Corps special operations forces personnel. Moreover, without a strategic human capital approach that is based on the comprehensive analysis of the critical skills and training required of its special operations forces personnel, the Marine Corps may be unable to effectively align its personnel with the Marine Corps special operations command's workforce requirements.

DOD partially concurred with our recommendation to require the Commander, USSOCOM, to establish a framework for evaluating Marine Corps special operations forces training programs to ensure the programs are sufficient to prepare Marine Corps forces to be fully interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces. DOD stated that USSOCOM is currently implementing the Joint Training System that is mandated by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction 3500.01D. According to DOD, the Joint Training System will provide the framework for USSOCOM to evaluate component training programs to ensure special operations forces operational capabilities are achieved. DOD also stated that Headquarters, USSOCOM, established the Training Standards and Requirements Integrated Process Team to complement the Joint Training System, which is focusing on standardizing training for individual skills across USSOCOM, and ensuring increased efficiency and interoperability. DOD stated that USSOCOM delegates many authorities to its service component commanders, including training their service-provided forces. DOD further stated that the Marine Corps special operations command has established the Marine Corps Special Operations School, which is tasked with evaluating all unit training programs to assess their combat capability and interoperability with special operations forces. While we agree that implementing the Joint Training System and standardizing training through the integrated process team will help ensure the interoperability of Marine Corps special operations forces, according to USSOCOM officials, these efforts will likely take several years to complete. We

continue to believe that in the near term, USSOCOM needs to evaluate the Marine Corps special operations forces training programs that are currently being conducted. While the Marine Corps has trained its conventional forces in skills related to the special operations forces' core tasks of direct action and special reconnaissance, it has not traditionally trained its forces in other special operations forces core tasks, such as unconventional warfare. For this reason, it is incumbent on USSOCOM to validate the ongoing training to ensure these new Marine Corps special operations forces units are adequately prepared to perform all of their assigned missions and are interoperable with DOD's other special operations forces.

We are sending a copy of this report to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Navy, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Commander, United States Special Operations Command. We will also make copies available to other interested parties upon request. In addition, this report will be made available at no charge on the GAO Web site at www.gao.gov. If you or your staffs have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Key contributors to this report are listed in appendix III.



Sharon L. Pickup, Director
Defense Capabilities and Management

Appendix I: Scope and Methodology

To assess the extent to which the Marine Corps special operations command (Command) has identified the force structure needed to perform its mission, we identified and reviewed Department of Defense (DOD) reports related to the department's efforts to increase the size of special operations forces by integrating Marine Corps forces into the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM). These documents included the 2002 Special Operations Forces Realignment Study, the 2006 Operational Availability Study, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review Report, and the 2006 Unified Command Plan. We analyzed available internal DOD documentation such as briefings, guidance, and memoranda that identified DOD's plans and time frames for establishing the Marine Corps special operations command. We discussed with officials at DOD organizations the processes that DOD utilized to determine and implement the plans for the new Command. These organizations include, but are not limited to, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict; the Joint Staff, Force Structure, Resources, and Assessment Directorate; Marine Corps Plans, Policies, and Operations; Marine Corps Combat Development Command; and Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs. We also interviewed officials with USSOCOM and the special operations components of the U.S. Central Command and U.S. Pacific Command to determine the role of these commands in the decision-making processes. We reviewed prior GAO reports and the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993¹ that discuss key elements of effective strategic planning. We interviewed officials from the Marine Corps special operations command to determine the status of the Command's efforts to activate Marine Corps special operations forces units and discussed the challenges the Command has identified that may affect the Command's ability to meet its full range of responsibilities. We analyzed documents that describe the Marine Corps special operations command's proposals to readjust its force structure to overcome its identified challenges. We discussed the status of these proposals with officials from the Marine Corps special operations command and Headquarters, Marine Corps. However, at the time of our review, the Marine Corps special operations command had not finalized decisions on proposed changes to its force structure and concepts of employment for its special operations forces units. As a result, we were unable to assess the extent to which any proposed changes to the Command's force structure would mitigate identified challenges and specified personnel shortfalls.

¹Pub. L. No. 103-62 (1993).

To assess the extent to which the Marine Corps has determined a strategic human capital approach to manage the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in its special operations command, we examined relevant Marine Corps policies for assigning personnel to conventional force units and the service's interim policy for assigning personnel to special operations forces units. We interviewed officials from the Marine Corps special operations command and Headquarters, Marine Corps, to discuss the service's career progression models for personnel assigned to Marine Corps special operations forces units. We also reviewed DOD plans to increase the active duty end-strength of the Marine Corps, and interviewed officials from Headquarters, Marine Corps, to discuss the service's strategy to meet the personnel needs of its special operations forces units and its conventional force units. We analyzed the Marine Corps special operations command's planned force structure and interviewed officials with Headquarters, Marine Corps, and the Marine Corps special operations command to determine the challenges the Marine Corps may face in developing a long-term plan to assign personnel to its special operations forces units. To better understand the unique personnel needs of the Marine Corps special operations command, we interviewed officials from the Command to discuss the specialized skills and training that are required by personnel who are assigned to special operations forces units to perform the Command's assigned missions. We reviewed available documentation on the current and proposed training plans that identify the critical skills and training that will be provided to Marine Corps special operations forces personnel, and we interviewed officials with the Command to discuss the status of their efforts to fully identify all special operations critical skills and training requirements. We reviewed congressional testimony by the Commander of the Marine Corps special operations command² and relevant Command planning documents to identify the Marine Corps special operations command's goal for a human capital plan that supports its assigned missions. We examined USSOCOM annual reports and strategic planning documents relevant to the Marine Corps special operations command, and interviewed USSOCOM officials to discuss the management of special operations forces personnel. We also reviewed our past reports that discuss effective strategies for workforce planning.

²Statement of Major General Dennis Hejlik, Commander, U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, before the Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats and Capabilities, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, January 31, 2007.

To assess the extent to which USSOCOM has determined whether Marine Corps special operations training programs are preparing these forces for assigned missions, we examined relevant laws and DOD doctrine related to the responsibilities of the Marine Corps and USSOCOM for training special operations forces personnel. We analyzed Marine Corps special operations command and USSOCOM training guidance for special operations forces. We examined USSOCOM documents related to the processes in place to establish common training standards for advanced special operations skills, and interviewed officials to discuss the status of USSOCOM's efforts to establish common training standards for special operations skills. We examined available documents that detail training programs for Marine Corps special operations forces. We interviewed officials from the Marine Corps special operations command and USSOCOM to discuss the processes used to identify and select training standards for special operations skills. We collected and analyzed documents related to USSOCOM's evaluations of Marine Corps special operations forces training, and we discussed the efforts that have been taken by the Marine Corps special operations command and USSOCOM to assess the effectiveness of these training programs. We conducted our work from August 2006 through July 2007 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Using our assessment of data reliability, we concluded that the data used to support this review were sufficiently reliable to answer our objectives. We interviewed the source of these data to determine how data accuracy was ensured, and we discussed their data collection methods, standard operating procedures, and other internal control measures.

We interviewed officials and obtained documentation at the following locations:

- Office of the Secretary of Defense
 - Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict
- Joint Staff
 - Force Structure, Resources, and Assessment Directorate, J8
- U.S. Marine Corps
 - U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Combat Development Command)
 - U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Installations and Logistics Department)
 - U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Intelligence Department)
 - U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Manpower and Reserve Affairs)

- U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Plans, Policies, and Operations)
- U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Programs and Resources)
- U.S. Marine Corps Headquarters (Training and Education Command)

- Marine Corps Forces Command, Norfolk Naval Base, Virginia
- Marine Corps Forces Pacific Command, Camp Smith, Hawaii

- I Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Pendleton, California
- II Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina
- III Marine Expeditionary Force, Camp Courtney, Okinawa, Japan

- Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command
 - Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command Headquarters
 - 1st Marine Special Operations Battalion
 - 2nd Marine Special Operations Battalion
 - Marine Special Operations Advisor Group
 - Marine Special Operations Support Group
 - Marine Special Operations School

- U.S. Special Operations Command
 - U.S. Special Operations Command, Center for Command Support
 - U.S. Special Operations Command, Center for Special Operations
 - U.S. Special Operations Command, Center for Special Operations Knowledge and Futures

- Theater Special Operations Commands
 - Special Operations Command, U.S. Central Command
 - Special Operations Command, U.S. Pacific Command

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Defense



SPECIAL OPERATIONS/
LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20301-2500

AUG 13 2007

Ms. Sharon L. Pickup
Director, Defense Capabilities and Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Pickup,

This is the Department of Defense (DoD) response to the GAO Draft Report, GAO-07-1030, "SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Management Actions are Needed to Effectively Integrate Marine Corps Forces into the U.S. Special Operations Command," dated July 13, 2007 (GAO Code 350908). The Department generally concurs with the recommendations, noting that actions consistent with the recommendations are underway.

DoD appreciates the work that has gone into GAO's comprehensive assessment. Your objective analysis will enhance the progression of U.S. Marine Corps Forces, Special Operations Command (MARSOC) to full operational capability by the end of fiscal year 2008. MARSOC is an evolving command, engaged in wartime Special Operations missions while continuing to build the processes and institutions needed to fully integrate into the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Kalev I. Sepp", is written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Kalev I. Sepp
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense
Special Operations Capabilities

GAO DRAFT REPORT - DATED JULY 13, 2007
GAO CODE 350908/GAO-07-1030

**“SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES: Management Actions Are Needed to Effectively
Integrate Marine Corps Forces into the U.S. Special Operations Command”**

**DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE COMMENTS
TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS**

RECOMMENDATION 1: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commandant of the Marine Corps to direct the Commander, Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, to conduct an analysis of the critical skills and competencies required of personnel in Marine Corps special operations forces units and establish milestones for conducting this analysis. This analysis should be used to assess the effectiveness of current assignment policies and to develop a strategic human capital approach for the management of these personnel.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) is currently conducting a detailed analysis of critical skills and competencies required to conduct their assigned missions. MARSOC will fully develop Mission Essential Task lists (METLs), Collective Training Standards, and Individual Training Standards in order to clearly state requirements for training and personnel. Headquarters, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), in an effort to facilitate this process, has placed a Joint Training System (JTS) Specialist at Headquarters, MARSOC to implement this program in an integrated fashion with USSOCOM’s evolution of the JTS, as mandated by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Instruction (CJCSI) 3500.01D.

RECOMMENDATION 2: The GAO recommends that the Secretary of Defense direct the Commander, U.S. Special Operations Command to establish a framework for evaluating Marine Corps special operations forces training programs, including their content and standards, to ensure the programs are sufficient to prepare Marine Corps forces to be fully interoperable with DoD’s other special operations forces.

DOD RESPONSE: Partially Concur. Headquarters, U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) is currently implementing the CJCSI 3500.01D-mandated Joint Training System (JTS). The JTS provides the framework for USSOCOM to evaluate component training programs and ensure Special Operations Force (SOF) operational capabilities are achieved. Additionally, HQ USSOCOM established a Training Standards and Requirements Integrated Process Team (IPT) in 2006 (as referenced in the GAO report) to complement the JTS. The IPT focuses on individual skills to standardize how skill sets are trained across the command, ensuring increased efficiency and interoperability. HQ USSOCOM delegates many Title 10 authorities to component commanders, to include tasks of manning, organizing, and training their Service-provided forces. MARSOC has quickly established units and systems, to include the Marine Special Operations School (MSOS) to meet Title 10 functions. MSOS has been

tasked with evaluating all unit training programs to assess their combat capability and SOF interoperability. MARSOC implemented a Recruit, Screen, Assess and Select process in May 2007 to screen prospective SOF operators for accession into MARSOC. Over the course of the next year, a refined initial training pipeline will be adopted to give every Marine assigned to MARSOC the required SOF baseline skills.

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Sharon L. Pickup, (202) 512-9619 or pickups@gao.gov

Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Carole Coffey, Assistant Director; Renee Brown; Jason Jackson; David Malkin; Karen Thornton; and Matthew Ullengren also made key contributions to this report.

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